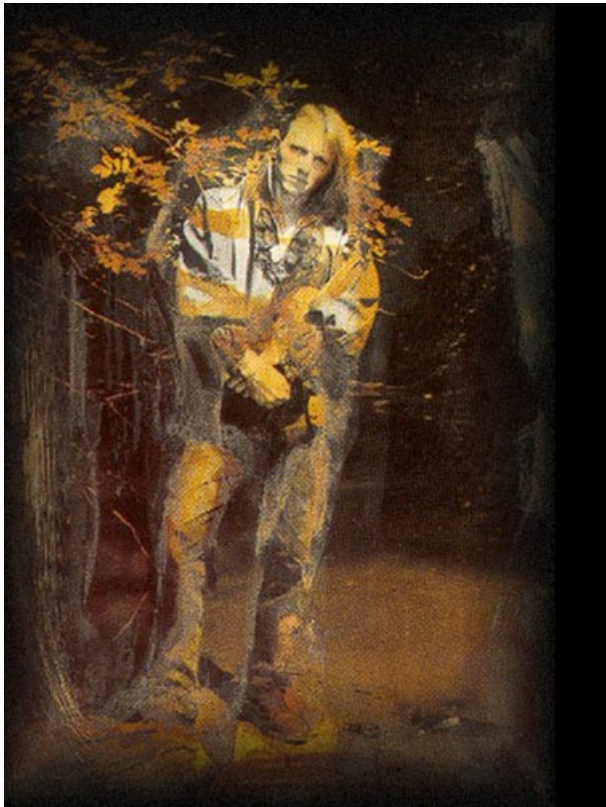


Interview with Stille Volk (2003)



Why this name in German?

The Stille Volk are a German tribe participating in the subterranean powers that also allow a dreamlike vision that refers to the irrationality of the depths of our collective unconscious. The Germanic language is not present in our region, which has more of a Romanic origin. Why this choice? First of all, because of its originality and in order not to be locked into a Pyrenean straitjacket that would make our group the champions of our culture. Our approach is not at all similar to a desire to promote Pyrenean culture in all its extensions. Mythology remains the only interest of this culture in our eyes.

In your songs, you refer to Pyrenean folklore and in particular to its Pantheon. Is it a claim to identity, an expression of beliefs, an illustration of a theme? All three at the same time?

In no case is it a claim to identity, nor is it the expression of particular beliefs. Paganism interests me above all in a phantasmatic perception and is the reflection of personal connections between myself and nature: I do not pray to the numen of a place nor do I participate in pseudo deist commemorations.

The Pyrenean pantheon fascinates me as a representation that men could have had of their world at a time when mythology and cosmogony served to explain what was perceived as the mysteries of existence: thus, by creating the representation of the storm or the lightning, it was thought that by paying worship or offerings to this personification, one would appease the anger of this divinity. It was a question of reassuring oneself by thinking of influencing the course of things. It is these representations that interest me, not the antics that are usually conveyed.

At the same time, it is always wonderful to imagine the sacredness of the landscape and space when we walk through it, but this is more a phantasmatic than an intellectual apprehension. The Dionysian functions of our personality are mixed with the Apollonian functions, our sacred part of childhood with the more constructed part of adulthood; I don't think we should ignore this part without it taking precedence over the other. Everything has to be in balance, like the ying and the yang.

***Hantaoma* stands out from a basic folk production, by a certain use of samples and strange, but evocative sound effects, which make one think of a strange dimension of Nature... Are you trying to establish a sound bridge between the world of men and that of the gods?**

Indeed, the evocation of a transfigured nature is reflected in our music. I particularly like your image of a sound bridge in the sense that it is a nature reworked by our psyche in a subtle work of our poetic and musical imagination. It is obvious that this research is carried out in an unconscious way: it is our inner world that expresses itself through our music. I would thus speak of a sound bridge between the world of men and our inner world, an ineffable nature accessible only through musical creation.



Some people might have taken your first album, *Hantaoma*, for a joke, or at least a rather fun realisation... It seems that it's not the case, as you said yourself. Does this strange, even extravagant side of some tracks have a function? (I'm thinking in particular of the tracks *Muscaria* and its sounds of flies or whatever, and of *La Complainte de Milharis* which opens with the bleating of goats... plus all the indescribable noises which punctuate the album)

Indeed, nothing horrifies me more than when someone tells me that our music is funny. With the examples you mention, our aim was to make the songs conjure up a dazzling array of images and connections between reality and supernatural sounds. When Rimbaud, Baudelaire and certain surrealists conjure up impromptu associations from their thoughts, I don't think their art can be called fun.

The example of Lautréamont is much more striking: the figures of the octopus, the shark and the pig, however bizarre their appearance and meaning, do not invite much fun.

The incongruous connections between symbols that have no apparent relationship most often provoke very strong imaginary flashes, thus giving a glimpse of universes for which a certain pact must be established between the creator and the listener.

You seem to like concerts, even if you don't do many...

Indeed, our stage performances are limited to 3 concerts for the moment only because it requires a reworking of our pieces; and given that we never rehearse... At the moment we have a repertoire based on Celtic and medieval tunes to which we add our own compositions that can be reproduced on stage, hence the impossibility of reproducing songs from *Ex-Uvies*, apart from *Selena Koronna*. Moreover, as there are only two of us left in the band, we can only consider playing with percussion and cello partners, hence the problem of time schedules and transporting equipment...

Is this contact with the public important to you, especially the popular public such as the elderly, whose opinion you said matters to you?

Indeed, their opinion is important to me because they are completely removed from all this Metal-related and pompous galimatias. It was a completely neutral audience with no musical fashions whose opinion was based solely on our performance. I don't reject the Metal audience in any way, as it was the only audience that deigned to take an interest in us, and I myself remain an unconditional fan of this music, even thinking that it is much less sectarian than other audiences that claim to be very open-minded.

You refuse to be labelled as a "folk band"; why? Would this label be too simplistic?

Our music doesn't hold any particular classification and at the same time applies to a number of styles: it is not fundamentally medieval even if it borrows elements from it, in particular for the instrumental elements; it is not fundamentally Celtic, nor traditional... The folk label bothers me because, on the one hand, it seems a little too simplistic and, at the same time, it conjures up certain images that do not fit in with our musical approach: it's a label that's a little too convenient and all-purpose and that some people use without thinking about its deep roots. On the other hand, it is obvious that it is always necessary to apply a certain name to the music we play.

As easy as it is for bands that express themselves in a well-defined style with its own rules, it is difficult for a band like us that does not obey its own musicological rules and that evolves from album to album. It's the same thing for a band like Garmana who, after a first CD largely based on traditional Swedish music, now works in more electronic atmospheres, while keeping traditional ritornellos.

Beyond a silly nationalism, do you think it's important to preserve age-old traditions and local cultures, often attacked by the same defenders of cultural diversity?

I do think it is important to preserve a number of aspects of our past. This is not a backward-looking approach, which I detest, but a desire to move forward by taking into account the elements of the past that serve to build a present and a future. We must not wipe out the past as some totalitarian regimes have done, or even France, for example for Vichy or the torture used during the Algerian war.

The problem persists in the fact that many traditional aspects are often reduced to mere folkloric demonstrations, especially in regions where the republican culture has tried to suppress all local particularism. It is important to note that in regions where this has been strongly felt, such as Brittany, the feeling of identity remains very much present. It is therefore difficult to distinguish between the folkloric dimension and the sectarian feeling engendered by an exacerbated regionalism.

Do you know and do you follow the European Dark Folk scene, which for the last fifteen years has been reviving folk music, making it the music of a certain "return to the roots", with bands like Sol Invictus, Death in June, and the mythical label World Serpent?

I don't feel particularly close to this scene. Apart from Death in June and Blood Axis, I'm not really familiar with this scene.

What do you think in general about this folk and especially "Europagan" "revival"? Is it a simple fashion? A real return to the roots? A dangerous fascist movement?

Concerning the fascist drift, I think that it is indeed present in this scene, having read interviews with Blood Axis: it is therefore obvious that this does not push me to look into this scene, although it is of course risky to make generalizations about the stupid and dangerous statements of a handful (I hope) of dangerous extremists who are in league with American skins movements. The term "Europaganism" seems to many to be a nationalist and fascist idea: it refers to an exacerbated paganism advocated in particular by the Nazis, who made a great deal of esoteric research diverted to extremist ends, under the impetus of Himmler, who was fascinated by Nordic mythology and who carried out a series of pseudo-pagan ceremonies in his castle.

In the same way that they hijacked Nietzsche's theory of the superman, they tried to appropriate a whole mythological and esoteric fund. For example, they sent Otto Rahn to investigate Montsegur in their research on the Grail, which was recently used for extreme right-wing gatherings for the June solstice. It saddens me that a number of aspects of the mythological and esoteric tradition are being hijacked in this way, where dangerously stupid buffoons are legion.

Stille Volk have made a demo, and two albums, going (to caricature a little) from the most folk to the most modern... Is there a meaning to this evolution? Temporal? From more concrete to more abstract?

There is no sense to this evolution. We compose according to the creative impulses of the moment without asking ourselves any questions about the musical logic involved. For example, for the third CD, we are returning to a much more medieval approach than we have done in the past, with lyrics taken from troubadours' works but with electronic rhythmic arrangements. This goes back to what I was saying earlier, namely to influence tradition to create something new. As far as the lyrics are concerned, it's not a question of taking an evolutionary approach either: the new pieces are therefore alongside troubadour themes with a reflection that I have carried out on the figure of Pan and on nature in general in a metaphorical dimension.

Your second album, *Ex-Uvies*, is in some ways much more gloomy than *Hantaoma*, more negative too... This is reflected musically, but also in your lyrics, which are also much more surreal than before. Can you give some indications about the meaning of your lyrics? Are we still in the "pagan" domain of *Hantaoma*?

The concept of *Ex-Uvies* comes close to a surrealist and intuitionist approach to paganism. In my opinion, paganism is not only confined to the mythological realm but has a broader intellectual approach. It is a particular relationship to nature and to things. It is an aesthetic conception of nature. Paganism, from "paganus" and "pagus", peasant and country, expresses by its very etymology, the relationship of man to the earth. Considering the ancient times, the fact of having divinized Nature generates a relationship to the sacred and at the same time an aesthetic fascination which generated an artistic representation of nature but above all an interpretation of nature which means that imagination played the greatest role alongside natural observation. In fact, if we consider pagan artistic art, we see the subjective representation of reality. To speak of paganism as the only religion is erroneous and dangerous because it is to integrate it anachronistically into a social process to which it is alien, it is to deprive it of the freedom which it embodies and which is its only essence in an artistic (and therefore not religious) perspective.